



(U) Trade Jargon: Got Your 'Ears'? (repost)

FROM: SIGINT Communications
Unknown
Run Date: 09/29/2004

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(U//FOUO) There are many different professions at work within SID, and each speaks its own specialized "language". Once a person becomes accustomed to hearing the jargon, it becomes second nature -- but an outsider sitting in on a typical SID meeting would likely have no idea what's going on! We thought it would be interesting to document some of this "SID jargon" -- we'll start by looking at the vocabulary of one of the core SIGINT professions: transcription.

(U//FOUO) Transcription is sometimes confused with translation. What's the difference? A translator takes text in one language and converts it into another. Transcription, on the other hand, is when one listens to speech and writes down -- in the original language -- what was said.** Sounds easy? It isn't! Aside from the fact that the sound quality may not be the greatest, there's the need to be proficient in a foreign language, not to mention that the speakers may have dialects, quirks of speech, use unfamiliar slang, etc.

(C//SI) Here's a list of commonly used transcription terms. It may give some insight into what it's like to be a transcriber (or "scribe" for short):

- **"foot pedal"** : a device used to allow the scribe to back up, play, fast forward, etc. a recording using his feet, thereby freeing up the hands for typing.
- **"rock on it"** : the act of listening to a certain garbled word over and over to try to figure out what is being said.
- **"A%"** (called A-validity or simply A-val): a "reliability indicator" that shows how certain the transcriber is that the text is accurate. A% means "certain"; B% is used with "numbers, words, or phrases that are audibly questionable to the transcriber but otherwise bona fide." (In other words, *probably* accurate.) C% is "the phonetic rendition of words or phrases that cannot be found in available reference materials." [Quotes taken from USSID 101, Annex C.] In a transcript, such a term might appear something like this: "Mr. Smith(B%) said he was the director of the newly-formed company."
- **"read" (or readability)** : this is a scale indicating how clear a recording is. A read of 1 indicates that there is nothing intelligible. A read of 5 (the highest, called "5-by") means near-perfect audio quality. You might hear a scribe say, "This read of 2 is terrible! I can only pick out a word here and there!"
- **"a cut"** : a recorded conversation. "There was nothing to report on the first three cuts, but the reporters will want us to work on the fourth cut asap, as a VIP was speaking!"
- **"voice id"** : when a scribe knows a speaker's voice so well that he can identify the person on that basis alone. "The caller didn't say his name, but the senior scribe knew the voice well enough to do a voice id on the person: it was Mr. Jones."
- **"ears"** : a scribe's earphones. "Put on your ears and come listen to this cut."
- **"ui fem"** : an unidentified female. "A ui fem came on the line and asked to speak to the operator." The counterpart to this is "ui male".
- **"scan"** : to listen quickly through a recording to determine whether or not it merits transcription.

- **"a gist"** : when a scribe summarizes in English what was said in a conversation. "It was very long and complicated, so I did a gist to explain what was happening."
- **"qc"** : quality control. An experienced scribe usually qc's the work of a beginner to check for accuracy.
- **"ntr"** : nothing to report.
- **"1-2G"** : one or two words are garbled. "XG" means an indeterminate number of words are garbled. Likewise, "1-2M" means "1 or 2 words missing."
- **"reverse dictionary"** : a working aid that lists the words of a language alphabetically starting with the last letter and working towards the first letter. (So in the Latin alphabet, words ending in "a"- rather than those starting with "a" - would be at the front of the reverse dictionary.) This is used when the first part of a word is garbled or indistinct, but the end is clear. Let's say a scribe hears "...partment". He can refer to the reverse dictionary to search for a word that would make sense in the context of the sentence (e.g. *com* partment, *de* partment, etc.)
- **"perschat"** : personal chatter (i.e. talk that is not business-related, and therefore of no interest).

**(U) Note: A third variant is interpreting, which is speech-to-speech.

(U) This is a slightly modified version of an article that first appeared in December 2003. Do you know of a profession that has highly-specialized jargon? Let us know!

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 DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED 08 JAN 2007 DECLASSIFY ON: 20320108